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23 March 1964

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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Libya: King Idris has for the present successfully reasserted his central, stabilizing role in Libyan politics.

His threat last week to give up the throne, which he publicly withdrew on 21 March, raised the possibility of chaos in Libyan political life. It was almost certainly designed to damp down the Arab nationalist sentiment that has gripped Libya recently and to provide an issue about which more conservative elements could rally.

Virtually all Libyan notables have hastened to declare loyalty to Idris and to assure him that his position on the throne was essential to Libyan stability.

The King has specifically stated that he is not dissatisfied with the actions of those in office and that he considers both the government and parliament loyal. He probably realizes that any abrupt retreat from the government's position urging the removal of the Western bases from the country would again raise nationalist sentiment to fever pitch.

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Laos: Factional tensions have risen again in Vientiane with the arrest of numerous neutralists by rightist authorities during the past few days.

*Although a few of the prisoners had been released by 22 March, the atmosphere in the capital remains uneasy.

Neutralist Premier Souvanna Phouma had earlier notified the right-wing military command that unless the prisoners were released by 24 March and the security of the neutralist personnel assured, he would withdraw with his supporters to the Plaine des Jarres. In addition, he had arranged for the International Control Commission to post some of its personnel at neutralist sites in Vientiane.

[Souvanna's moves may also reflect concern over renewed reports that General Kouprasith, the local right-wing commander, is planning a take-over in Vientiane.] This concern is undoubtedly heightened by the knowledge that three key security battalions--normally stationed near Vientiane by General Phoumi to keep a check on his potential rival Kouprasith--are currently engaged in operations in southern Laos.

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NOTES

Cambodia: Sihanouk evidently intends to exploit the 19 March South Vietnamese attack on a Cambodian village to renew demands for an international guarantee of Cambodia's borders. On 20 March, in identical letters to Premier Khrushchev and President De Gaulle, he used the South Vietnamese attack to underline the urgency for a Geneva-type conference. Despite Saigon's forthright and unprecedented apology for the incident, he has called for a postponement of bilateral border talks with a South Vietnamese delegation now in Phnom Penh and demanded an apology and reparations from the United States.

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South Vietnam: General Khanh has strengthened his position by staging yesterday's unanimous vote of confidence by the country's top executive body, the Military Revolutionary Council (MRC). He has previously indicated that he would try to discourage coup plotting and present a more democratic facade by enlarging the MRC and allowing it to vote on the government in about six months. In the meantime, he may use yesterday's vote as a mandate to replace discontented members of his government.

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